

**The Mexican War Letters  
of Lieutenant Theodore Laidley**

**[Head Quarters of the Army Brazos San Iago,  
Jan 19<sup>th</sup> 1847]**

My dear Father

**[Trip to Brazos Santiago – hazards & illness]**

After a long, tedious and, to me, a disagreeable journey, I arrived here nearly a week since. We were delayed at Orleans a couple days, and then, at the mouth we stuck on the bar in crossing it where we remained four days longer before we could get off.

In the mean time a “Norther” came up and we had some experience in the sudden changes of the Southern climate. From a height of 86° the thermometer fell below zero and ice of considerable thickness was formed. We found great difficulty in keeping warm, with all the blankets, overcoats and cloaks that we could find.

We had a fresh wind and would have made quick passage but a strong current carried us some forty miles past our port before we made the land.

I was not disappointed in my apprehensions as to seasickness, for I suffered very much – did not leave my berth or take anything to eat during the three days that we were out. I came to the firm determination never to go any journey by sea if it could possibly be avoided.

**[Brazos Santiago, as a depot]**

This is considerable of a port on the north end of an island of the same name, just opposite Pt. Isabel – a great depot for stores of all kinds. It is a sterile sandy low island, a few houses, great piles of stores, immense number of wagons and mules and a good deal of business in loading, unloading moving and moving stores, etc.

### **[Living Quarters]**

We are so fortunate as to have a small room large enough for four beds on the floor – where we sleep and stay. For our meals we go to the hotel which is a Mississippi steamboat run ashore where they give us steamboat fare for twenty dollars per month.

We expect to be hear[sic] till the 28<sup>th</sup> or 30<sup>th</sup> of this month when we will sail for Tampico.

### **[The Weather]**

The weather is very changeable one day very pleasant, warm, the sun shining and real summer weather – in a few minutes, before you are aware of it the wind has shifted to the north and it is cold and disagreeable March weather. These northers last a day, two or three, and then it is delightful for so long when another comes on.

### **[Prices at Brazos Santiago and Local Game]**

Everything sells at enormous prices and we are subjected to great expense while we remain here, At Tampico, I understand they fare better and pay less. We get fine fish here and turtles in great abundance. Venison is also plenty but of an inferior quality and poor beef. Water is the most difficult to obtain, being brought from the Mississippi or the Rio Grande and even that does not taste well.

### **[Effects of Trip on his Horse]**

My poor horse has suffered terribly and is now in no fit condition for a campaign.

The rolling of the vessel in heavy seas bruised him and he was detained so long as to be almost starved.

**Head Quarters of the Army Brazos Santiago,  
Feb 12<sup>th</sup> 1847**

My dear father,

Contrary to our expectations and much against our will, we still find ourselves at this place, but as we now expect to get off soon and probably will not have another opportunity of sending a letter off before we do, I will write and send by this vessel the letter I promised you and which you will be looking for.

**Brazos Santiago, Feb 26<sup>th</sup> '57**

My dear Father

**[Detained by Weather]**

Still at Brazos! Not through any accident or anything of that kind but detained by adverse winds and wrong calculations.

We have been leaving for a month and have not gotten off yet, though I hope to get off in reality tomorrow if the wind only subsides that we may cross the bar to embark.

These winds have no regard for the plans of men and as in the present case frequently interfere materially with them.

**Tampico, Mexico,  
March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1847**

My dear Father

**[Sailing to Tampico]**

We left Brazos on the 3d of this month and after a week's sailing reached this place last night having had a long and tedious passage tho in other respects a very pleasant [one].

**[Town of Tampico]**

This is a beautiful town indeed. As we approached it coming up the river it presented as pleasant a scene as I ever beheld. It is situated on the left bank, on a rising slope and is seen to advantage on an approach from the south. The houses are mostly of one story built of stone, occasionally a two storied one, flat roof and parapet walls, grated windows, and the windows all opening and fastening inwards.

The streets are paved with stone, sloping inwards and no gutters.

**[The Next Section Deals with Vera Cruz]**

**Camp Washington, near Vera Cruz  
March 27<sup>th</sup> 1847**

My dear Father

I understand that the "Princeton" sails to-morrow with the news of the surrender of the city and castle together with all the troops munitions etc.<sup>1</sup> As you will, doubtless, feel anxious to know of my safety and everything connected with it I hasten to give you a short sketch of the operations.

**Vera Cruz, Mexico  
April 2d 1847**

My dear Father

I feel somewhat at a loss what to write to you about the siege, knowing that you will see much in the papers about it, lest I should tell you what you have already seen over and again.

**Vera Cruz, Mexico  
April 11th 1847**

A rather unexpected order to march, on short notice, makes me write in more of a hurry than I wish, and I expect less satisfactorily than you would wish.

**[Leaving Vera Cruz and Effects of Hot Climate]**

The advance marched on the 8<sup>th</sup>, and for fear that they might be in want of some large guns to tear down entrenchments, barricades or other obstacles we start off to-morrow with a section of heavy guns.

It is about time that we were leaving the “tierras calientes,” as they call it, the hot lands; though the yellow fever has not yet made its appearance among the troops or in the city, still sickness of some kinds, fevers or the disease of the country, is pretty common and becoming more so every day. The volunteers not knowing how to take care of them, thus suffer the most and deaths among them are becoming more common.

**Pass of the Sierra Gordo, Mexico,  
April 19<sup>th</sup> 1847**

My dear Father

I wrote to you last as I was starting from Vera Cruz which place we left on the 13<sup>th</sup> with a train of five heavy carriages with guns &c and trailers[?] of ammunition forage &c. As the Army had stopped at this place and was waiting for us to come forward before attacking the enemy who had strongly fortified the hills commanding the road for a long distance.

**Jalapa, Mexico,  
April 26<sup>th</sup> 1847**

My dear Father

As soon as I arrived here, I was sent back to the battle ground to send off some cannon as trophies for the United States.

**[Availability of Fruits and Description of People of Jalapo]**

We find here a great variety of fruits here oranges, bananas, plantains, pine apples &c. and it is quite a treat to get some fine fruit. For the first time I have seen some respectable decent looking people, since I

have been in Mexico. Here you may see as well dressed people as anywhere. They are particularly noticeable for the extreme whiteness and neatness of their linen and the good taste of their dress.

**Puebla, Mexico,  
May 19<sup>th</sup> 1847**

My dear Father

**[Arrival at Puebla]**

We marched into this City on Sat. 13<sup>th</sup> inst. And it was a grand holiday for the citizens who lined the streets on either side wherever we went on our way to the main plaza.

The city is said to contain 75,000 inhabitants and is as pretty a city as I ever saw situated in the middle of a valley by far the most lovely that I ever beheld.

**[His Views of Local Citizens]**

The higher classes receive us as kindly as they dare, the lower classes, those whom we are doing great service are our bitterest foes, through ignorance with which their generals keep them slaves and with regard to us – They think us little better than devils and are ready to cut our throats the first opportunity that offers.

**Puebla, Mexico,  
June 3d 1847**

My dear Father

**[Description of City Cathedral]**

The famous Cathedral received a share of my attention and it is altogether a new thing to me in the way of architecture. It is very large indeed and the interior is one blaze of gilt, and pictures, some of them very fine. The altar is the most magnificent of anything I have seen – numerous beautiful statues, sacred subjects, are placed around and over it, and though not so splendid as it has been, still it is, now, to us who, in the States, are not accustomed to such things, something new and very striking.

**[Public Squares]**

There are several large public squares in the place that constitute an important feature in the beauty of the place. They abound in trees, shrubs, plants and flowers of every description with fountains interspersed here and there, forming altogether a most beautiful promenade and ride, for which purposes it is very much resorted to in the cool of the evening – but bands of music play almost every evening which renders it additionally agreeable.

**[Celebrating Corpus Christi Day]**

This is a great day among the Mexicans called Corpus Christi or body of Christ. This morning there was a great ringing of bells, even more than usual and I understand they formed processions and marched about through the church with numerous lighted wax candles, and gave them to many of our officers to carry, whom curiosity had taken there.

**Puebla, Mex,  
Oct. 24<sup>th</sup> 1847**

My dear Father

**[Rumors of a Peace Treaty]**

I heard a piece of news, yesterday, that the Mexican Congress had met at some place near the city, that Mr. Trist had been out there and there was a fair prospect of a treaty being concluded in two or three months – if I had not been deceived so often, or if it were any other nation than the Mexican, I would believe it, but as it is, I will believe it when the treaty starts for Washington.

**Puebla, Mex.  
Nov. 5<sup>th</sup> 1847**

My dear Father

The train from Mexico brings us for the first time the news of the late battles and it seems that we will never get done hearing of the killed and wounded.

### **[Use of Shawls by Women]**

The Capt. Promised to relieve me for a while and let me visit the City of Mexico; I want to go there to stay; for here I shall be with volunteers and no regulars, which will be any thing but pleasant.

Monday last was a great day with the Mexicans – All Saints-Day – the shops were mostly closed but few persons were at work; in the afternoon, every one turned out to ride or walk and such an array of beautiful shawls I never saw. It seems indispensable for every one to have an embroidered shawl costing from twenty five to one hundred and fifty – usually of the brightest and most gaudy colors.

### **[A Mexican Meal]**

I do not know that I have stated that I am living with a Mexican family – we do not eat at the same table, but sometimes they give me a real Mexican dinner. And a strange enough affair is it to an American. Their ideas of the culinary art differs very widely from ours. They make great use of red peppers and some of their dishes it is almost impossible for one to taste who is not accustomed to it. Tortillas, a thin, very thin cake of indian meal baked on a hot plate is a very common kind of bread and almost indispensable to a Mexican. I have tasted it but it did not please my palate, and in truth very few of their dishes would please any one, at first trial. Their pulque I like very much and it is a very nutritious and healthful beverage; about as strong as sharp cider or porter.

**Puebla, Mex.  
Dec. 1<sup>st</sup> 1847**

My dear Father

### **[Learning Spanish and His View of the Spoken Language]**

I suppose we need not think of getting out of the Country for years to come, I have accordingly gone to work to learn the language and am getting along pretty well – it is very easy, more so than the French, and is the prettiest language I have ever heard, by far. When well spoken, it is very musical, and also expressive. The Mexicans do not speak the pure Spanish, but in some instances quite different – using



many provincialisms, and somewhat different pronunciation in many words. In a short time I hope to speak it fluently as well as write and read it.

**[Visit to Bishop's Home: Its Paintings and Library]**

A few days since I visited the Palace of the late Bishop; I had heard of its fine paintings and library and was glad of an opportunity to witness them. The paintings were certainly beautiful some of them by the Old Masters, others copies – the collection is large and finer far than I ever saw the property of a single individual. The library contains eighteen thousand volumes, in French, Italian, Latin, Spanish, Greek & Hebrew, some few in English. It is estimated to be worth sixty thousand dollars – the gallery of paintings, more. His library, paintings and everything that he owned are to be sold and the proceeds, after defraying his debts, are to go to the poor. He was quite eminent for his learning, friendly to the Americans, and was the same whose hand Gen Worth kissed, when we first arrived here. This was his city palace.

**City of Mexico,  
Jan. 11<sup>th</sup> 1848**

My dear Father

**[Goes to Mexico City]**

The expectation of an expedition being dispatched to San Louis Potosi very soon brought me to the Great city where I arrived the 20<sup>th</sup> of last month.

At this season of the year, when everything seems parched, for the want of water it is not so pretty, but we could see the extent of it embracing at one glance the whole valley of Mexico, surrounded on all sides by the immense chain of mountains, its surface here and there dotted with lakes and small volcanic, conical-shaped hills.

**[His Living Quarters]**

On my arrival I found the Ordnance officers comfortably established in [Maj.] Genl [Gabriel] Valencia's house, where I took up my quarters with them. I have a comfortable room, looking out on the public walk

or park, with a carpet, settee, chairs &c and a bust of Washington. In the court yard is a fountain and orange trees loaded with golden fruit, flower pots with flowers blooming and blossoming.

### **[The Market]**

We have a good market, plenty of wild ducks, and vegetables and fruits, though we have to pay for everything most extravagantly. I walked through the market on New Year's day and I could not realize that it was the depth of winter.

I went to the palace to call on the [U.S. Military] Governor [Brig.] Genl [Persifor F.] Smith, in reaching his apartments which are those of Santa Anna's, we passed through a fine room a kind of ante room, where was seen a large full length picture of Genl Washington, which had taken place of that of Iturbide, when [our] troops took possession.

### **City of Mexico March 22d 1848**

My dear Father

### **[Variety of Entertainment in City]**

Sunday is the great day for horse-racing, balls, theatres, and pleasure excursions of all kinds, and our people, principally, outsiders, hangers-on, teamsters, Quartermaster's men, etc. display a wonderful aptness in adopting the manners and customs of the people where the[y] find themselves, I think they rather outstrip the natives on many of the roads to vice.

As yet we have no news of treaty – it has been looked for several days, but has not yet made its appearance. There are but few who are of the opinion that we will get out this spring, before the yellow fever, and the rest seem to have made up their minds to stay till fall and think themselves fortunate if they get out then.

**[Not Anxious to Leave Mexico]**

Personally, I am not so anxious as very many to get away. I am lo[a]th to leave this delightful climate, knowing that it must be better for me than the changeable one of the north and if I am ever to get well, I stand a much better chance of it here than at home.

**[Fear of Guerrillas]**

Though hostilities have nominally ceased, still we have to exercise the same precautions in going from one place to another as before. The guerrilla parties are as numerous and kill and rob the same as ever. This puts a great hindrance to travelling and prevents us from visiting where we would otherwise go.

**City of Mexico,  
April 6<sup>th</sup> 1848**

My dear Father

**[Illness of Army]**

About one fourth of the whole army is sick; sometime since it was a greater proportion. In an army of some sixteen thousand men, the number of sick is quite considerable and requires a deal of transportation to move them. We are waiting with some degree of impatience for the treaty – we have heard of its passage nearly a week.

**City of Mexico,  
May 13<sup>th</sup> 1848**

My dear Father

**[Anxiety About War's End and Return Home]**

I let the last mail go off without sending you a letter, so I will write by the British Courier who leaves tomorrow, a friend having kindly promised to have it forwarded for me.

We are in such a state of uncertainty as to whether we shall have peace or war, whether we shall leave immediately or remain till fall in the event of peace, that I have no desire to write till the thing is definitely settled.